

LOOKING BACKWARD TO THE SEASON OF 1912

By W.W. Tyson - CHS 2

Come, let's turn the page of circus history backwards through the medium of THE BILLBOARD - just over 33 years ago. The issue of the Billboard at hand is one dated April 27th, 1912. My, what a thrill for all of us if these shows were still all on the road!

In passing we cannot overlook the fact that 1912 was the year when the ill-fated Titanic was sunk in the Atlantic with such a great loss of life. Showmen were among those lost as mentioned in this issue, and exhibitors on the Carnivals of that day were making the best of showing slides and pictures of the Terrible Disaster, just as those of today are using scenes from World War Two.

But - come to the circus! Wonderful illustrated pages announced the fact that the Hagenbeck-Wallace Show had just opened at Peru, Ind., on April 20th and that the Great Buffalo Bill Far West and Pawnee Bill Far East had commenced the season at Harrisburg, Pa., on that same date.

What fine shows these two were - but space will only permit a glance at the list of performers. Hagenbeck-Wallace boasted a program of twenty acts from the "Grand Entry" to the Hippodrome Races. Many names still familiar to circus fans were to be seen -- including The Famous Nelsons. The Great McCree-Davenport Riding Act; Victor & Madame Bedini - High School Acts. Five pictures are shown of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Show e.g. One of Hagenbeck; one of Wallace; View of Front Door; Closed den in parade, and Madame Bedini.

Wm. Sweeney's Cowboy Band provided the music for the Two Bills' Show - which started its show with a Grand Review - through the covered wagon and Stage Coach Scenes -- to the Gruber - Elephant, Dog and Pony Act. Six cuts were shown of the Buffalo Bill - Pawnee Bill Show and included Buffalo Bill; Pawnee Bill; Chief Iron Tail; Buffalo Bill shooting Glass Balls and a group of Riding Indians.

Now to the route list - and what a list it is too! Al. G. Barnes was playing West Coast dates. Barnum & Bailey was at Brooklyn, N.Y. April 22nd to 27th; Campbell Bros., in Kansas and had exhibited at CHS Bill Green's home town, Washington, Kansas on April 27th. Downie & Wheeler Shows in Virginia; Gentry Bros., in Louisiana; Haag Show at Graham, Va., April 25th; J.E. Henry's Wagon Show out in Oklahoma and Arkansas; Honest Bill Show in Kansas too.

Miller Bros. & Arlington's 101 Ranch Wild West was in California and headed into Nevada; Montgomery Queen Show (E.H. Jones, Mgr.) in Missouri; Rice Bros., Circus opened at Clifton, N.J., May first. Ringling Bros. at Danville, Ill., the 25th.

Frank A. Robbins in New Jersey; Sells-Floto in California and Young Buffalo & Col. Frederick Cummins Shows opened at Peoria, Ill., April 27th. We also see a note that Tom Mix was reporting in that city to fill his contract on that show for season of 1912.

And that is not all of them - for glancing through the pages we find that Sig Sautelle was to open at Homer, N.Y., on May 10th; Lowande Circus was in South American, where it was as well known as the Barnum & Bailey, Ringling Bros., or Hagenbeck-Wallace were in North America. Tony Lowande was its Manager - a brother of Oscar Lowande, and it had headquarters in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

A full two-page layout in centre of the issue is devoted to the pictures of "Featured performers with Barnum & Bailey Shows - 1912" and mentioned in the ad were Winston's Equestrian Seals; Chas. Seigrist Troupe; Famous James Fillis Family of Riders; and a host of clowns besides Drill's Concert Band, and Prince Youturkey - King of the Wire and Rehlander's Troupe of Educated Pigs.

A notice stated that Billy Nelson with his Jungle Show opened with the Two Bills' show on April 20th. Continued in this issue also is the "Life of

P.T. Barnum". Lithographing companies asked shows to write for "Illustrated Catalogs" - and my how some of the collectors would like to have these books now!

Cook & Barrett Show wanted circus acts of all kinds as did Geo. W. Hall's Trained Wild Animal Shows. A call appeared for all people engaged for Gollmar Bros. Shows to report at Baraboo, Wisc., for opening date, May 4th. Stull Bros. Great Wagon Show wanted musicians, Drivers and Canvasmen.

Rippel Bros. Shows are also mentioned, along with Texas Bud's Days of '49, showing in Texas. And many others -- and remember all this history in just one issue of the Billboard.

As a word of caution let me say - never pass up the opportunity of purchasing any old circus magazines for your files. The Billboard and New York Clippers always contain much of interest. Besides - they give you valuable information for identifying old photos, handbills and other advertising matter that comes to hand.

COLLECTORS STAGE EXHIBITION OF THE CIRCUS AT WASHINGTON CO. MUSEUM
Hagerstown, Md., August 19th to September 3rd.

From newspaper clippings sent to us
by P. R. Hemphill, CHS

Daily Mail - Aug. 20th: "The ghost of the greatest show on earth returned to Hagerstown (Md) yesterday, at the opening of the "Circusiana" exhibition at the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts. The color, excitement and traditions of circuses that are unknown to the younger local generations are reproduced at the museum in a unique exhibition of circus posters, photographs, mementoes, models and souvenirs. One of the largest of its kind ever held in Eastern part of the country, the display has been provided by the co-operation of the Museum with Hagerstown members of the Circus Historical Society, Circus Fans Association and Circus Model Builders and Owners Association.

"Almost 400 persons visited the exhibit yesterday. To many of them the items on display brought back to life - scenes witnessed decades ago when the Hagenbeck-Wallace, Buffalo Bill, Ringling Brothers, and Barnum & Bailey Shows were at their height.

"From the collections of local and out-of-town circus fans, an extensive assortment of priceless photographs of circus scenes was attracting wide interest..... Around the walls of the Museum Gallery are circus posters. In display cases, laboriously constructed miniature models of circus wagons and paraphernalia are exhibited, and souvenir programs, route sheets, advertisements, letter heads, and other circus trappings are also on display.

"The men and women who are keeping alive the tradition of the Big Top will have their collections on display at the Museum during the coming two weeks"

We are happy to report that a goodly number of members of CHS sent parts of their collections for this fine exhibition, and let us hope this is only the beginning of such large exhibits throughout the United States and Canada.

To list those who did exhibit would take too much space except to say that they included items from Canada - and particularly the East and Mid-Western sections of the United States.

We wonder which will be the next group to sponsor such a large exhibit. Due thanks should be given to the Museum for having offered space in their building at Hagerstown, Md.